



## Transmissions: The Tipping Point

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In the book "The Tipping Point," Malcolm Gladwell discusses that one moment where the unique becomes common, and when dramatic - even chaotic - change can occur. It is hardly a concept unique to Gladwell, and is likely familiar to anyone who has observed, for example, President Bush's popularity over the last few years.

In the scope of transgender politics, we are hitting a tipping point of our own.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force recently conducted a survey. They asked 800+ average folks about the inclusion of transgender people in federal laws against workplace discrimination. In an added twist, pollsters even attempted to deliberately sway the matter by using transphobic language.

What they uncovered was that a majority - 59 percent - would support transgender-inclusive language. Support remained strong even when transphobic language was added to the mix.

Such a finding flies in the face of so-called conventional wisdom. The argument has been that adding transgender to a bill like the Employment Nondiscrimination Act would be tantamount to suicide for the bill. Therefore, the argument goes, it is better for a bill that supports sexual orientation to get passed now, with a future transgender-specific bill to come along later.

This argument that rights for some trumps rights for all - at least in GLBT circles - has been going strong since at least the 1970s. It is a tactic that has survived from the days of the National Gay Task Force - the precursor to the NGLTF - through the Empire State Pride Agenda. The latter being the group from which the NGLTF's current executive director hails from. It also remains the supposed "trump card" in the fight over bills like ENDA and the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

Of course, for the last decade, transgender activists have been trying to argue in favor of trans inclusion. Not for the reasons that many might claim - that transgender people are trying to ride the coattails of far more deserving gay men and lesbians - but because the inclusion of language specific to gender identity and expression benefits us all.

Yes, I'm sure that there are more than a few lesbians and gay men who have been marginalized for being out as lesbian or gay - that is, for reasons clearly demonstrable as being because of this. Perhaps they had a photo of their same sex partner on their desk, or applied for health benefits for their domestic partner, and faced persecution from their workplace.

I suspect, however, that you would hear of far more instances of people who were assumed to be gay or lesbian based purely on how they choose to express their gender. Without clear protections that take this into account, it becomes a loophole that a good legal team could spend a lot of time exploiting.

One could argue that language that focuses on gender expression and identity could be more useful, overall, than sexual orientation. One could even make a good argument that loving a member of the same sex is a form of gender-inappropriate behaviors.

The important thing is that all of this talk of bills not being passable because the majority would not support transgender inclusive language simply no longer holds water. We've reached a tipping point, and the facts do not bear out this antiquated supposition.

At 59 percent, there is still a lot of leeway. It is a majority, but it isn't yet a landslide of support. It is a tide, but a tide that

could, with some work, likely be stemmed.

I think that we have a majority based purely on transgender people getting out into the public eye and educating others about our lives, needs, and goals. The more people see us and hear our needs, the less frightened that will be of something they fail to understand.

If we can continue to push on this, and make our case, and show just who we are and how such rights can help create true equality, it becomes harder for people to argue against such an issue of basic fairness. That is worth fighting for, and that is worth continuing to tip towards.